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Joy Morton, founder



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LILACS FROM EARLY TILL LATE

It has been said that the lilac holds a deeper foothold in man's affection than almost any shrub, and that in no other plant is the spirit of home more intimately entwined. The truth of these statements is evident when it is recalled that the early settlers brought lilacs with them when they immigrated to New England and that a few carefully protected lilac roots were usually tucked away somewhere in the covered wagons of the pioneers of the west as they set out to conquer the wilderness. Even today old home sites may be recognized by the remaining lilac clumps which still mark forgotten doorways.

Syringa vulgaris, the Common Lilac of Southeastern Europe, is the most familiar species, and the one responsible for so many of the beautifully colored varieties in cultivation today. It is only one of a group of desirable forms, however, whose blossoms provide a succession of lilac interest from late April until early July.

The Korean Early Lilac, *Syringa oblata dilatata*, has the distinction of opening the lilac blooming season, its loose clusters of sweetly fragrant tubular blossoms appearing in late April or early May ten days or two weeks in advance of the major lilac display. Deeply colored in bud, the flowers open to variable hues of pink, lilac and mauve. Handsome foliage is another attribute of this floriferous tall bush, foliage which unlike that of any other lilac assumes purplish and gold autumnal coloring.

Soon after the Korean Early Lilac display is over, a new race of hybrids ("oblata dilatata" x "vulgaris") come into prominence. Originating in the trial grounds of Mr. F. L. Skinner, nurseryman of Dropmore, Manitoba, they are characterized by exceptional hardiness and vigor, profusion, fragrance and earliness of bloom and freedom from the often objectionable suckering habit. In addition to pure white, double flowered "Gertrude Leslie", such color variations as the following are available: "Asses-sippi" (1935), a single broad petalled pinkish mauve, deep rose lilac in bud; "Excel", a lighter, single mauve pink with large flowers in generous sized panicles; "Minnehaha", with single purplish lilac flowers of large size; "Nokomis", the earliest to open, a pinkish lilac budded selec-

tion expanding to bluish lilac and giving an excellent mass effect in spite of its smaller blossom clusters and more subdued coloring; and "Pocahontas", the darkest of the "*dilatata*" hybrids, whose deep toned, reddish buds open into single reddish purple florets similar in coloring to the "*vulgaris*" variety, "L'Oncle Tom". The flowers are loosely borne in generously proportioned trusses, and appear even on small sized bushes. *Syringa Hyacinthiflora*, an older hybrid of the same parentage produced in 1878 by Victor Lemoine of Nancy, France blossoms simultaneously, bearing double flowers of bluish lilac. Its earliness and pleasing lilac fragrance are the features commanding it most.

Also included in the early flowering group is a larger and equally important class of hybrids, crosses between "*vulgaris*" and "*oblata giraldi*", the Purple Early Lilac. Noted like the preceding group for their earliness and prolificacy of blossom, they offer the additional advantage of a greater color range, generally larger panicles, and an overall floral effect more comparable to that of the "*vulgaris*" types. Of the numerous varieties in cultivation, favorites here include "Catinat" (1922) and "Lamartine", (1911), both single lilac pinks; "Descartes" (1916), lilac mauve; "Louvois" (1921), magenta in bud opening single violet; "Necker" (1920), single pinkish; "Pascal" (1916), single lilac; "Scotia", a fine clear pink which holds its color well; "Turgot" (1920), light lilac of pinkish cast; and "Villars" (1920), with single lilac flowers.

By mid May or sooner the early hybrids have completed their show and the forerunners of the extensive "*vulgaris*" group begun to take over. "Le Printemps", an early double pinkish variety introduced by Lemoine is one which helps bridge the gap. With over five hundred varieties in cultivation the matter of attempting compilation of any list of "best" ones presents a real challenge. This recalls the wisdom of a statement credited to Charles S. Sargent, for many years director of the Arnold Arboretum, to the effect that, "the twelve best lilacs are the twelve which appeal to you most"! Believing this to be true, the following baker's dozen have been selected as being representative of the best of the single and double flowering forms in the various color groups into which lilacs have been classified. Among the whites our choice would include "Vestale", a large paniced free blooming single and "Ellen Wilmott", an imbricated double of great charm. Among the violets "De Mirabel", a floriferous single, is noted for its good color and dense panicles, and "Marechal Lannes" for its large double florets in good sized trusses. In the blue or bluish class "Decaisne" and "President Lincoln", both singles, are assured a place on our list, the former for its handsome clusters of large azure lilac florets, the latter for its early panicles of wedgewood blue. Our choice in the lilac class would go to "Henri Martin", a tall grower whose extremely long panicles are composed of many very large, very double flowers. Among the pinks nothing yet produced compares with "Lucie Baltet", a compact growing bush with single flowers of a rare shade of salmon pink, dark in bud lighter when expanded. And among doubles, "Katherine Havemeyer", a broad trussed pinkish lilac variety with wine colored buds, is noteworthy. Considering the magenta or reddish purple varieties, "Capitaine Baltet" and "Marechal Foch", both singles, are excellent. The former has enormous cupped florets of violet-lilac, the latter flowers of carmine rose in large,

open but very showy panicles. Of the doubles, early blooming "Paul Deschanel" deserves mention. It has broad-petalled flowers of a pleasing shade of lilac rose borne in exceptionally showy clusters. The dark purples seem to attract more attention than any other group and two single flowered varieties certain to please are "Mrs. W. E. Marshall" and the newer late blooming "Night". "Mrs. W. E. Marshall" is a bush of neat rounded habit known for its profusion of long pyramidal trusses of purplish wine colored flowers. "Night", a new Havemeyer introduction is the darkest and latest flowering purple of all.

Also conspicuous among midseason lilacs is the widely planted Chinese or Rouen Lilac, *Syringa chinensis*, a chance hybrid of "*laciniata*" and "*vulgaris*" parentage originating in 1777 in the Botanic Garden at Rouen, France. Although often erroneously called Persian, it is actually intermediate between the two in appearance, its rather loose spreading habit and comparatively small foliage suggesting *Syringa persica*, and its hardness, vigor and floriferousness, "*vulgaris*". While its individual flowers are small they are arranged in rather large panicles with a tendency to droop. For this reason they are not as easily spoiled by rain as the stiffer trusses of the so called French lilacs. In coloring the type is purplish lilac, but there are varieties with white, "*alba*", reddish lilac "*saugeana*", and other colored flowers. A pleasing fragrance characterizes them all.

The true Persian Lilac, *Syringa persica*, another simultaneously blooming hybrid (*afghanica* x *laciniata*), is even older (1753), a rather low growing (to 6 ft.), small leaved and small paniced sort with tiny pale lavender flowers. What was once considered its variety, the form "*laciniata*", is noteworthy in being the only lilac with lobed foliage.

Small soft woolly leaves of almost circular outline distinguish *Syringa microphylla*, the Chinese Littleleaf Lilac, from all other species. Another midseason bloomer, it not only figures prominently in the spring sequence but again in the fall, when a second crop of flowers is often produced on the current season's leafy shoots. It is most conspicuous in May, however, just before breaking into blossom. For then the innumerable small spikes of purplish red buds massed in loose inflorescences impart a distinctive ruddy cast. A striking combination of unopened buds and partially expanded light colored flowers follows. Individually the blooms are small with slender corolla tubes and pinkish lilac petals, but their mass effect is good and their fragrance enchanting. Eventually growing into a slender branched medium sized bush to 8 ft. or so in height, the Littleleaf Lilac needs plenty of space in which to show its beauty most advantageously.

The Late Lilac, *Syringa villosa*, which carries on the sequence after the midseason types have bloomed reaches its climax during the early part of June when, coming as somewhat of a surprise to those unfamiliar with its belated flowering habit, its erect branches erupt into innumerable dense terminally borne pyramidal panicles of rosy pink to dusty lilac flowers. Though exceedingly showy, they possess a rather heavy scent which is best appreciated at a distance. Mature specimens of the Late Lilac develop into compact round headed bushes 10 to 12 ft. tall and equally broad with

stout, erect branches and broad, thick, rather coarse textured yellowish green leaves. In order to take advantage of the plant's hardiness, vigorous constitution and free blooming tendencies, it has been used extensively in hybridizing. Native of North China.

Syringa Josikaea, the Hungarian Lilac, the European counterpart of "*villosa*", is the next species to bloom. And, while scarcely measuring up to the Chinese types ornamentals, its later flowering season and lustrous dark green foliage sets it apart from the others. The purplish lilac blossoms appear in narrow tapering 6 to 8 inch panicles, and although not especially fragrant or outstandingly beautiful in color, are freely produced. The fact that the rosy lilac buds do not open simultaneously serves to prolong considerably the floral effectiveness. "*Josikaea*" crossed with "*reflexa*" has resulted in several interesting hybrids worth mentioning. *Syringa Josiflexa* *Enid* is one, a coarse leaved upright bush with dusty rose pink buds opening into clear, lighter colored blooms; "*Lynette*" a similar appearing hybrid with pinkish lilac flowers, and "*Pallida*", a more rounded shrub with light green foliage and narrow upright panicles of pale lilac.

E. H. Wilson, the noted plant explorer, was responsible for the introduction of our next late blooming species, distinctive *Syringa reflexa*, the Nodding Lilac from Central China. This is the lilac which in blossom exhibits a feature quite uncommon among other members of the genus, nodding or drooping flower panicles. Narrowly pyramidal in shape and frequently elongated to eight or ten inches, they present quite a spectacular sight both in the bright rose pink bud stage and after the pale pink tubular blossoms have opened. The oblong lance shaped foliage of medium dark green is also ornamental, though coarse, leathery and inclined to droop. The fact that the performance of this lilac locally is sometimes disappointing detracts from its landscape value.

The Nodding Lilac has figured prominently in the development of a new race of hybrids, however, lilacs renowned for their hardiness, lateness of bloom, density of habit, good foliage and exceptional floriferousness. Largely the work of Miss Isabella Preston of the Horticultural Division of the Central Experimental Farm in Ottawa, Ontario, the *Syringa prestoniae* selections represent for the most part crosses between *Syringa villosa* and *S. reflexa*. And, while a pronounced similarity is noticeable between many of them, several are outstanding for the variation and clarity of their coloring. The following are favorites: "*Coral*" a nicely shaped bush with deep coral buds opening into light pink flowers free of any trace of lilac; "*Handel*", noted for its dense clusters of rosy lilac flowers fading lighter; "*Hiawatha*", with large flower clusters of purplish rose; "*Isabella*", a floriferous form whose deep mauve pink buds open into purplish lilac florets in large pyramidal clusters; "*Nocturne*", an earlier blooming small flowered selection bluish lilac in bud, opening light lilac and retaining its fresh appearance over a long period; "*Oberon*", pale lilac fading almost white; "*Olivia*", a good purple; and "*Royalty*", a floriferous late blooming variety considered the best of the dark forms. Its clear deep purple buds open into violet purple flowers of good size borne in trusses of medium density.



Around mid-June one may look for the misty, creamy white panicles of the Peking Lilac, *Syringa pekinensis*, a tall, slender branched shrub or gracefully spreading small tree (to 25 ft.) discovered in the mountains of North China by the Abbé David. Although most conspicuous at flowering time when the loose, half drooping panicles of considerable length appear at the ends of the branches, the Peking Lilac is not without interest at other seasons, too. The summer foliage effect is particularly good, the long pointed, bright green, pear shaped leaves hanging gracefully from slender, drooping petioles, and in winter, attention is drawn to the highly polished, reddish brown bark which exfoliates in thin papery flakes.

The only lilac attaining tree stature and the species bringing the lilac blooming season to a close is the Japanese Tree Lilac, *Syringa amurensis japonica*, landscape subject extraordinary doubling as both specimen shrub or small tree. It is late June or early July before its immense compound panicles reach full size, 12 to 18 inch terminal inflorescences composed of many tiny creamy white florets of feathery texture. Their landscape effect is quite spectacular and one sure to be welcomed at a time when blossom is not too plentiful. Like "*pekinensis*", however, the heavy perfume of its flowers may become unpleasant at close range.

Trained to a single trunk, the Tree Lilac will develop into a small round headed tree to 25 or 30 feet tall with cherry-like bark and luxuriant broad dark green leaves of good size. In its shrubby aspect the plant is an upright branched multiple stemmed bush of pleasing appearance, useful both as a specimen for accent planting or as a screening material.

E. L. Kammerer

Some Nurseries Offering Extensive Lilac Selections

Bernecke, E. J.—3903 S.W. Baird St., Portland, Oregon

Brand Peony Farms—Faribault, Minnesota

Bryant Nurseries—Princeton, Illinois

Eton, Mark, Lilacland Nursery—Glen Head, Long Island, New York

Farr Nursery—Weiser Park, Pennsylvania

Gardner, Edward J., Nursery—201 Rich Street, Horicon, Wisconsin

Heards Landscape Nurseries—4727 Beaver Avenue, Des Moines 10, Iowa

Inter-State Nurseries—Hamburg, Iowa

Kingsville Nurseries—Kingsville, Maryland

Strawberry Hill—Rhinebeck, New York

Upton Nursery Company—4838 Spokane, Detroit 4, Michigan



The Chinese or Rouen Lilac, *Syringa Chinensis*, a chance hybrid ("*laciniata*" x "*vulgaris*") noted for its hardiness, vigor and floriferousness.

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